

## **Testimony in favor of SB 948:**

### ***Ac Act Addressing Education Funding and Racial Equity in Connecticut***

Constance Vickers, Director of Legislative Affairs

City of Bridgeport

Good Morning Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel and Representative McCarty, and the distinguished members of the Education Committee. My name is Constance Vickers, I am the Director of Legislative Affairs for the City of Bridgeport. I am testifying today in support of one of the most consequential bills I have witnessed before this legislature, SB 948: Ac Act Addressing Education Funding and Racial Equity in Connecticut. This bill, if passed and fully funded, would begin to address a \$640M gap in education funding between white students and students of color.

In the Governor's proposed budget, a student in second grade will not be fully funded until they are a senior in high school. This bill removes the phase in, ensuring that students are fully funded now. Can we really afford to wait nearly the entire duration of a student's educational experience to fully fund them? In cities like Bridgeport, we have already been waiting too long.

Decreasing the threshold of the concentrated poverty weight to 60% will allow Bridgeport to be included, as we were not before. Our archaic and regressive property tax system not only places the high burden of municipal education funding while balancing services on cash strapped cities and towns, but also can falsely portray the concentrated poverty needs as this formula details. Common sense will tell you that Bridgeport has one of the highest needs of concentrated poverty in the state and should be funded as such.

The increase of the weight for English Language Learners is also a key equity piece. The state has realized an increase of nearly 13,000 ELL students over the last decade, according to the School + State Finance Project. In Bridgeport, as of 2019 over 20% of our students require ELL services. This bill would provide much needed support for these essential services.

I was not born and educated in Connecticut. When I moved here in 2008, I assumed all schools in Connecticut were better than the rural Pennsylvania district I had attended. However, I quickly realized that many districts fall short due to these chronic inequities. This bill is an opportunity for an equitable path forward as it holds all municipalities harmless, while addressing the districts who have been underfunded for decades.

What we are currently facing is intrinsically in lock step with a series of racist systems. Our students in Bridgeport face many obstacles based on the color of their skin and the median income of their neighborhood. While there are several bills facing the legislature this year directly addressing fixing these systemic issues, this bill is by far the most important. This legislation is a strong step in the right direction to ensuring that all students in Connecticut's public schools have equitable access to a quality education. Our children deserve the same opportunities regardless of skin color, income, or zip code. Thank you for raising this bill, I hope that the committee will support it.